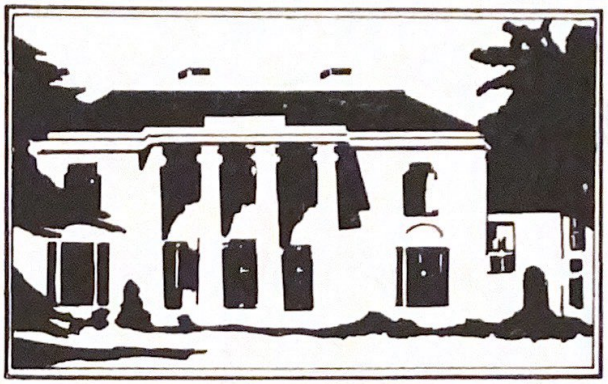
DIGSWELL ARTS TRUST



Digswell House Welwyn Garden City

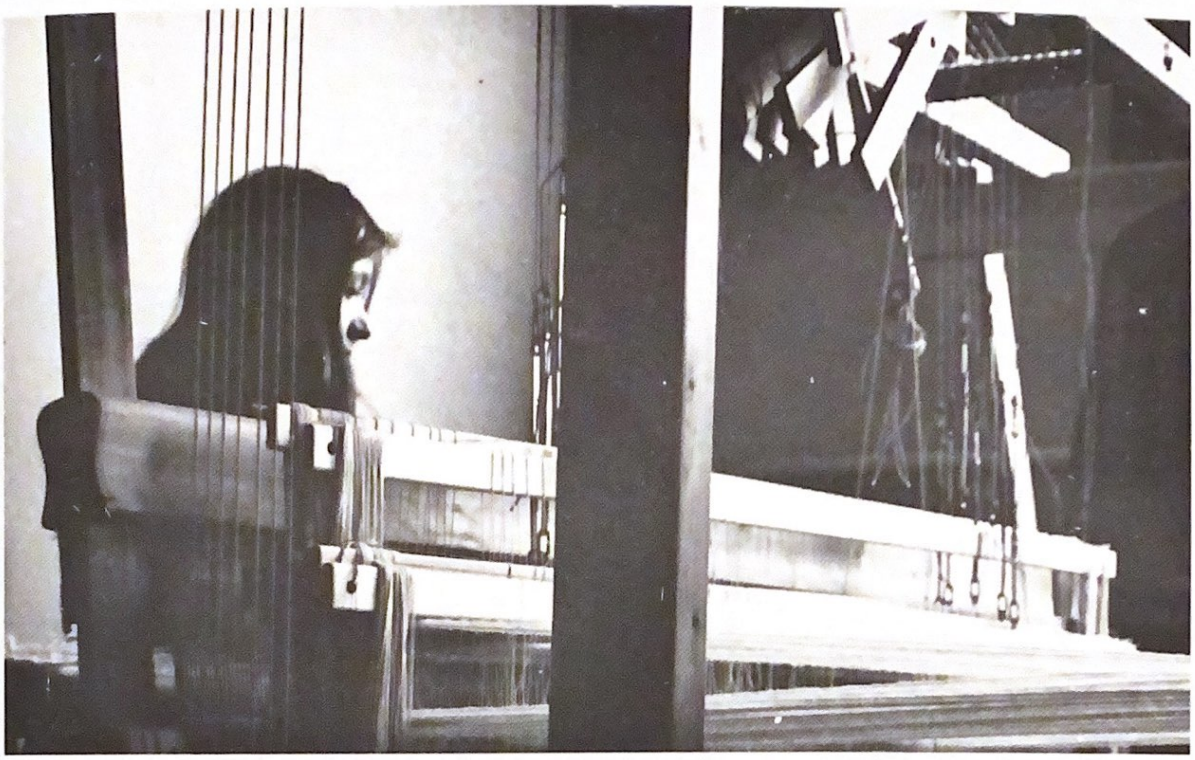
DIGSWELL ARTS TRUST

INTRODUCTION

Digswell House and surrounding grounds.

The Digswell Arts Trust is an Educational Charity centred in Welwyn Garden City. It was founded in 1957 partly in response to emerging difficulties confronting our industrialised Society – problems of leisure and affluence, prompting fundamental questions about our order of values and quality of life. The aim was to relate creative artists in a realistic way to these problems; to explore their relevance in a technological age; to give them a chance to create and integrate in a New Town, and to offer the public the most natural opportunity to learn about and enjoy their work. Perhaps they could have a vital impact on the visual environment – perhaps too their influence would permeate the invisible values and directly enrich the life of the community. These are brave and valuable ideals. The problems that give rise to the Experiment are even more pressing now. What is being done?

WHY WE EXIST



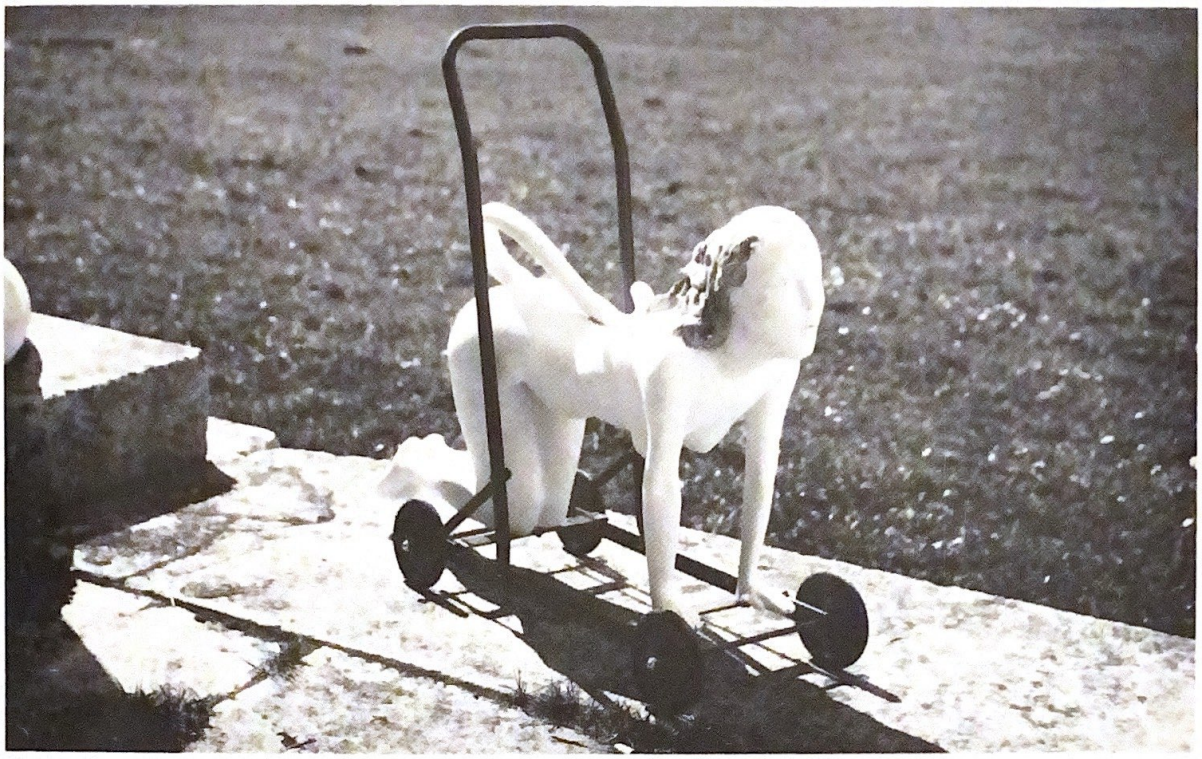
Weaving at Digswell.

Digswell House, a Regency building with outhouses and cottages on the outskirts of Welwyn Garden City, has been converted into an Arts Centre. Here up to 20 artists and craftsmen have their homes and studios. Here also the Trust runs a mixed programme of events, lectures and exhibitions, in a hall converted by the residents for this purpose. The public are invited into Digswell House to meet the artists and craftsmen and to enjoy cultural activities in a beautiful setting. This is a valuable opportunity for a natural and meaningful contact between people and art in the making that the Trust seeks funds to develop. Over the years thousands of people have been to Digswell House on educational visits, to view exhibitions, attend lectures and events, see the House and receive tuition.

WHAT HAPPENS AT DIGSWELL

One of the regular Digswell Talks.

Artists and craftsmen at Digswell are selected for Fellowship by the Trust to give them an opportunity to work in a stimulating environment before they have established themselves. There is no bias towards any particular art or craft: the aim is to build a vibrant community where there will be an interchange of ideas and skills. Several now distinguished artists and craftsmen, (including Hans Coper potter, Peter Collingwood weaver, John Brunsden printmaker and James Butler sculptor) have benefited from living at Digswell. In return for this opportunity the residents pay a substantial contribution to the running and administrative costs of Digswell House. They also agree to assist in social and educative work. The Trust regards the provision of living and studio accommodation to artists as particularly important in a time of spiralling property values.

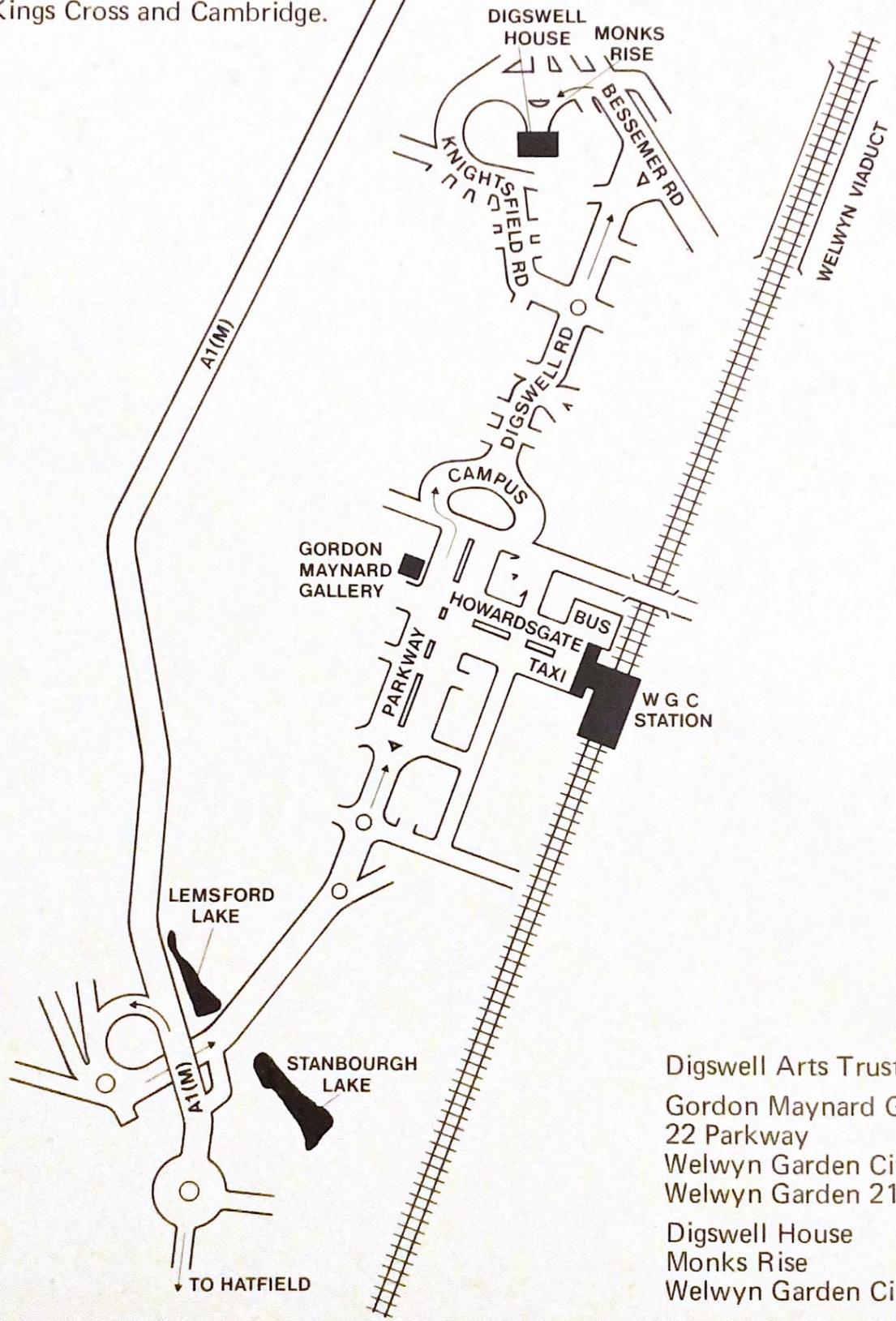


Work by David Roft, resident sculptor.

The Gordon Maynard Gallery has a convenient position in the centre of Welwyn Garden City. It was originally planned by the Trust as a showcase for Digswell artists and craftsmen, but has extended its programme to include a wide variety of exhibitions including those of local and educative interest. The Digswell Fellows mount an annual show, but this might be followed by an exhibition of school childrens' art or a display demonstrating the importance of local archaeology. As the only point of contact with the visual arts in Welwyn Garden City, it has an important part to play in local cultural life.

GORDON MAYNARD GALLERY

How to find us
Welwyn Garden City is on the direct rail link between Kings Cross and Cambridge.



Digswell Arts Trust

Gordon Maynard Gallery
22 Parkway
Welwyn Garden City
Welwyn Garden 21506

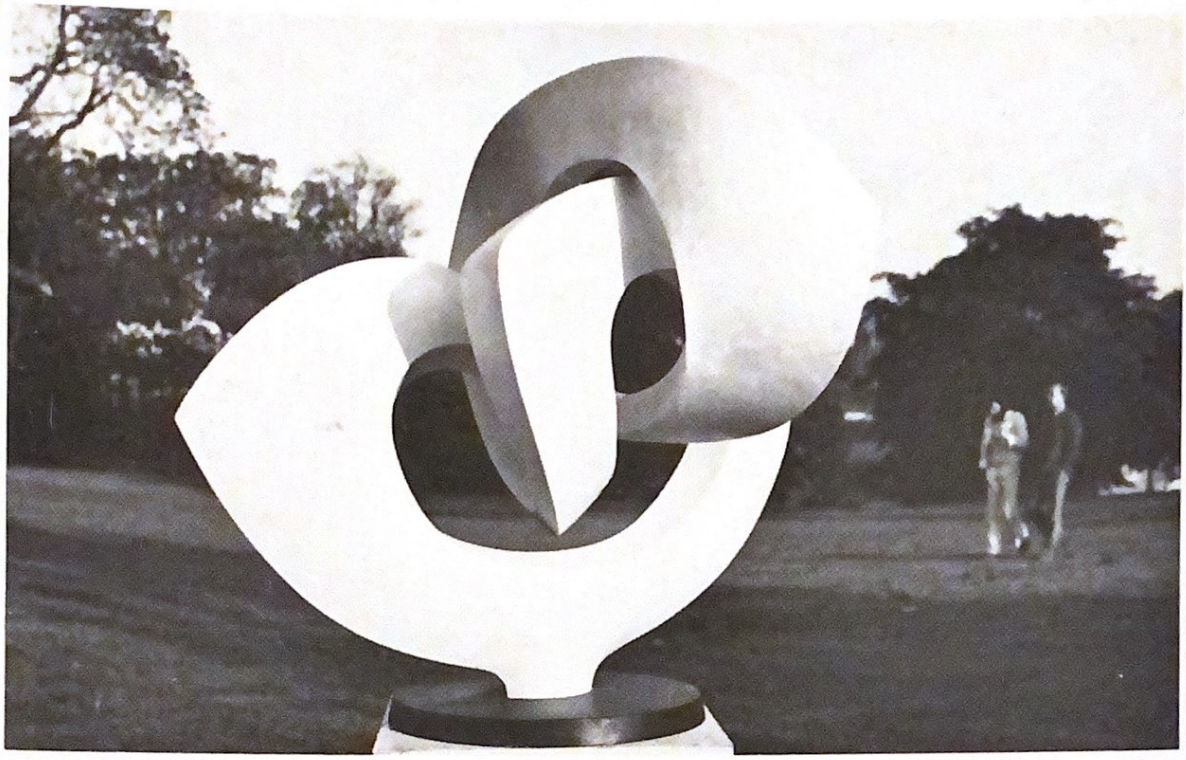
Digswell House
Monks Rise
Welwyn Garden City

Some of the residents and their families.

The Digswell Arts Trust resulted from a rare combination of vision and administrative genius in Henry Morris who had been Chief Education Officer for Cambridgeshire and Cultural Adviser to the Minister of Housing and Local Government. A man who put his ideals into practice, Morris persuaded the Welwyn Garden City Development Corporation that the aims of the Trust were important to the Community. Digswell House, and later the Gordon Maynard Gallery, were made available and are currently rented from the Commission for the New Towns. As regular finance there are the Fellows' contributions and income from a very small amount of invested capital. The major part of the finance required must be raised from year to year, and the Trust is grateful for the continuing support of local authorities. The Eastern Arts Association, trusts and individuals also give vital assistance without which the Trust would be unable to operate.

Morris died in 1961 but his vision of the arts and artists playing a vital and integrated role in society was far from a pipe-dream. Since the founding of the Trust more Art Centres have come into being; support for the arts has increased and above all the practice of the arts has flourished. Digswell is part of this process and will continue to encourage it.

THE TRUST: PAST AND PRESENT



A commission executed by a Digswell sculptor, R. J. Mitchell.

There is still a great opportunity for increased interaction between the district and the Digswell community. Works have been commissioned from Digswell artists and craftsmen not just by the New Towns Authorities, but by the local community – both private and industrial. There has also been a long tradition of schools and local societies visiting Digswell House and artists going out to talk and demonstrate. We need to do more to create the impact Morris wanted, and the Trustees have appointed a full time administrator to put into action policies that will ensure greater communal involvement.

The Digswell Experiment is still in its infancy. A project of this nature is a long term venture. A start has been made; the Trust has the experience on which to build. Meanwhile Digswell is providing something unique; – a community of artists where there is a mixture of disciplines but no restricting dogma, social, political or artistic – a community that aims towards social involvement but at the same time tries to create art and craft of the highest standards.

All graphics designed by Warwick Evans,
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